

The Consumption of the Sacred: Popular Piety in a Late Medieval Hungarian Town

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This paper interprets late medieval religious culture by considering lay expectations of and attitudes towards the clergy. The analysis is prompted by and framed around a convent controversy, which was extensively documented in the course of an ecclesiastical trial. Contemporary ‘convent reform’ is not conceived as an ecclesiastical event, but rather as a symptom of the changing relationship between town and convent. The description of religious provision in the town shows that there was a strong lay demand for the clergy and the rituals performed by them, and that parishioners were ready to invest financially in maintaining local priests, even if it involved considerable additional expenses. The conflict between town and convent can therefore be considered as a result of a liturgical deficit in the spiritual market of the town. The parishioners’ behaviour is interpreted as a symptom of the eucharistic and penitential devotional culture of the time, which was regulated in practice by the principle of intercession and the institution of good works. The paper argues that the divergent strands of late medieval religious culture generated a ‘consumption’ of the sacred. The mendicant friars had a special role in the late medieval religious market as they provided opportunities for religious experiences which differed in kind from parish observances.

‘**T**he friars ... neglected the convent in terms of divine service as well as the number of friars so much, that only three, two or even one, occasionally not even one friar lived there. In this way, there was such a huge deficit of not only prime and other canonical hours, but holy masses, said or sung, too, that sometimes there was no mass celebrated at all ... If, by papal authority, the convent had not been provided for by

MOL, DL=Magyar Országos Levéltár [National Archives of Hungary], Diplomatikai Levéltár [Collection of Charter Photographs]; *Pom. Quad.*=*Pomerium sermonum quadragesimalium*, Hagenau 1550; *Processus*=Biblioteca Apostolica Vaticana, Fondo Barberiniani Latini, vol. 2666 (*The register of a convent controversy, 1517–1518*, ed. G. Erdélyi, Budapest–Rome 2006)

introducing other friars of better life in place of the Augustinians, the convent would have already become totally desolate.¹

This was one of the seven articles framed against the Augustinian friars living since the thirteenth century in the centre of the market town of Körmend in west Hungary. In 1517 the town's lord, who was also the convent's patron, Thomas Bakócz, cardinal and archbishop of Esztergom (*Strigoniensis*),² the most influential prelate-politician of the kingdom of Hungary of the time, with the pope's permission initiated proceedings against the friars. As a result, the Augustinians were removed from the convent and replaced by observant Franciscans. The Augustinians, however, did not accept the archbishop's decision and sought protection from Pope Leo X, who ordered an investigation of the case. The opening quotation comes from the register book of the ecclesiastical process carried out in May 1518 by local prelates designated by the pope.³ The availability of rich documentation, primarily the detailed register of witness interrogations concerning the everyday life of the friars and the endeavours of the laity to restore the religious life in the convent, provides an exceptional opportunity for a microanalysis of the religious culture in the town and its surroundings. In particular the relationship of convent and town, and the interactions of lay and clerical piety will be examined in order better to understand the laity's expectations of the regular and secular clergy and the ways in which the laity 'consumed' the sacred in the period preceding the Protestant Reformation.

The witness interrogations: whose voice?

The articles against the Augustinian friars in Körmend were framed primarily in religious terms. The charges were presented by a professional lawyer, *magister* Martinus Újhelyi, the procurator of the archiepiscopal see,

¹ *Processus*, fo. 17r. Quotations are translated by the author.

² Vilmos Fraknói, *Erdődy Bakócz Tamás élete* [*The Life of Thomas Bakócz of Erdőd*], Budapest 1889; György Székely, 'Reform und Politik im Leben des Kardinals Bakócz', in S. Hoyer (ed.), *Reform-Reformation-Revolution*, Leipzig 1980, 68–84.

³ The register was probably compiled in Buda, the capital of Hungary, before being sent to Rome on 18 June 1518. It is 108 folios long, written on paper, with the authentication of the apostolic and royal notary public on fo. 110r. The notary was Iohannes Miletinczi, who in his colophon summarised his procedure in preparing the *registrum*. According to him, the transcription of the witness depositions was based on the one hand on his original, obviously Hungarian, shorthand notes and, on the other hand, on the revised protocol-like form ('ex prothocollis et notis meis ... extraxi ... , transcripsi et exemplavi'). The first part of the protocol contains the documents produced or presented during the first part of investigation in Buda (fos 2r–17v), and was written up by a disciple of Miletinczi. The second part, the witness depositions were transcribed by the notary himself.

who was the legal representative during the process of the lord of Körmend.⁴ It was the young magnate, Petrus Erdődy, nephew of the cardinal, who actually acted as lord. In their formulation, they were aimed at reforming the convent, in other words restoring the integrity of religious communal life. According to the seven *articuli*, the convent, contrary to the will of the founding king, was either abandoned or inhabited by only one or two friars. Consequently, the Augustinians performed the divine services defectively, or not at all. The convent buildings had become ruined as a result of their negligence.

The other set of arguments was about morality, or rather immorality, mirroring the familiar figure of the womanising and drunkard friar, typical and central figures of contemporary common talk and literary genres of all sorts:⁵

In the taverns of the market town and villages the friars gorged and guzzled with peasants, just as they squabbled and quarrelled, and words often turned into fist-fights and blood ... They took bad women and women of ill repute into the convent and the refectory, where they conversed with them contrary to the rules of religious life.⁶

The agents of 'reform' furthermore legitimised their interference in local affairs by referring to the interests of the laity: 'Because of all this, parishioners were highly scandalized, their devotion towards the church of the Virgin Mary dwindled and generated open contempt and disdain towards the clerical order and the clergy in general.'⁷ The Augustinians in their appeal declared, however, that they had led an exemplary life and regarded their removal as a violent action on the part of the archbishop and the Franciscans. Instead of a reform, they talked about unlawful dismissal (*spolium*).

The debate was to be decided by the hearing of witnesses. The closing article of the charges against the Augustinians stated that 'Everything that has been said is true separately as well as a whole, and popular opinion in the area was and still is the same about them.'⁸ The argumentation rested on the notoriety of the Augustinians' sinful life. In course of the procedure applied by canon law (known as the *ordo per notorium*), the plaintiff only had to demonstrate that the offences were publicly known, which in the absence of eye-witnesses could be related by any member of a certain community. The forty-nine men summoned to the parsonage of Körmend from the town and its vicinity were thus expected by the agents of reform to confirm the Augustinians' sins and the notoriety of their listed offences. The Augustinians

⁴ András Kubinyi, 'Írástudás és értelmiségi foglalkozásuk a Jagelló-korban' ['Literacy and the lay intelligentsia in the Jagiello era'], *Magyar Herold* i (1984), 186–208 at pp. 193, 204.

⁵ Eduard Fuchs, *Az újkor erkölcstörténete* [*The history of morals of modern times*], I: *The Renaissance*, Budapest 1926; H. Horváth (ed.), *Az apácafőkötő: Régi olasz novellák* [*The nun hood: a collection of old Italian short stories*], Budapest 2003. On theological, legal and penitential literature see Dyan Elliott, *Fallen bodies: pollution, sexuality, and demonology in the Middle Ages*, Philadelphia 1999, passim.

⁶ *Processus*, fo. 17v.

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ *Ibid.*

therefore voiced their suspicion that the *fama publica* rested on some ill-intentioned rumours mongered by malevolent people of low social status.

When assembling their witnesses, therefore, the Erdődys had to strike a balance between the knowledge of witnesses and their credibility. Witnesses were considered credible first of all if they were independent of either party. Since Körmend was a market town, its inhabitants were all serfs of the Erdődys. Although the town had been founded by royal settlers, at the end of the fourteenth century it fell into the hands of secular lords. While ‘proper’ towns with self-government and legislation were either directly dependent on the crown (free royal towns), or were in ecclesiastical hands, market towns were under the authority of secular lords with a limited self-government. Due to the low number of *civitates* (around thirty with a population of between two and twelve thousand), from the second half of the fourteenth century market towns (*oppida*) developed as a special kind of settlement (by the end of the fifteenth century there were about thirty of them with a population of more than four hundred), economically functioning as something between villages and towns proper. Their inhabitants were considered serfs (*iobagiones*) by law and their more severe civil and criminal conflicts were alike handled before the lord’s tribunal.⁹

The townsmen of Körmend had the right to choose a town judge each year, who was responsible for everyday local affairs. As to their economic privileges, they traded custom-free in the region and had a weekly market. At the beginning of the sixteenth century the town had 130 house plots and approximately 600–700 inhabitants. Most of them earned their living from the tilling of arable land, wine-growing, raising livestock and trading crops and animals, leaving only a minority of craftsmen. Körmend was an average size late medieval market town of the country, and although it was not a manorial centre, its seigniorial and religious institutions ranked it among the most important towns of Vas county. The new parish church of St Elizabeth was founded in the second half of the fifteenth century by the Ellerbach magnate family, and the medieval *castellum* at the north-east corner of the town was turned into a four-corner renaissance castle by Petrus Erdődy.

During the trial therefore the majority of the witnesses (thirty-four men) were collected from eighteen villages from the neighbourhood of Körmend, and they were not Erdődy serfs. Besides the citizens of Körmend, there were also two noblemen who had previously lived in the town as castellans and three priests: two altarists and the parish priest. From the neighbouring villages sixteen petty nobles, nine serfs and nine parish priests were also summoned. The noblemen (having the title *nobilis* denoting simple nobles)

⁹ For the medieval history of Körmend see Zsuzsanna Bándi, *Körmend a középkorban* [*Körmend in the Middle Ages*], Körmend 1987. For the development of the town system see Vera Bácskai, *Magyar mezővárosok a XV. Században* [*Market towns in fifteenth-century Hungary*], Budapest 1965.

differed only marginally from peasants in their properties and way of life, only four of them having some landed properties and serfs and being addressed by the honorific *egregius*.¹⁰

Is it possible to capture the voices of the ordinary men homogenised by the normative structures of power and law into a *stilus curiae* Latin text? Or did the knowledge of the elite and the authority of the powerful ultimately silence the voice of the people?¹¹ As with other documents of the period, the protocol of the Kőrmend enquiry bears the marks of the elite's hand or, rather, its notions and power.¹² This reduces the chances of an original cultural dialogue being revealed. Even so, the witness hearing is best conceived of as a kind of interaction between the representatives of ecclesiastical and secular authorities and the ordinary people. The task is to spot the words and knowledge of ordinary people in the interstices of the performance of the agents of official culture.

The possibility of a real cultural dialogue was of course limited, apart from the fact that words and thoughts were being produced under the influence of the prescribed *articuli*, and in the context of the unequal power-relations which favoured the Erdődys in their protection of the Franciscans. While the actions and attitudes of witnesses and their fellow townsmen towards the friars may be assessed from the stories that they told later, it has to be borne in mind that, for a number of reasons, their words distort their social and mental worlds. First of all they are the act of remembering and communicating, and in a court room.¹³ For example, it is interesting that during the interrogation, on the one hand the witnesses unanimously expressed an anti-Augustinian attitude, claiming that they had indeed lived sinfully and negligently, and that they therefore totally supported and agreed to their expulsion. (The only exception, who strengthens the general rule, was Blasius, parish priest of Halastó village, who says that 'he is fond of the Augustinians, ... but neither his body nor his soul is yearning for the observant Franciscans, and he would prefer that the Augustinians stayed in

¹⁰ On petty nobles in general see István György Tóth, 'Szabadosok és kisnemesek' ['Libertines and petty nobles'], in Ferenc Szvircsek (ed.), *Magyarország társadalma a török kiűzésének idején* [Society in Hungary at the time of the expulsion of the Turks], Salgótarján 1984, 55–67. On the nobility of Vas county see Kálmán Baán, 'Vas vármegye 1554: évi nemesi összeírása' ['The register of the nobility of Vas county in 1554'], *Magyar Családtörténeti Szemle* vi (1940), 97–102, 140–2, 163–8, 185–215, 237–40, and Gyula Balogh and Márton Szluha, *Vas vármegye nemes családjai* [The noble families of Vas county], repr. Budapest 1999.

¹¹ The notion of cultural dialogue used here is that proposed by Carlo Ginzburg in relation to inquisitorial processes: 'The inquisitor as anthropologist', in his *Clues, myths and the historical method*, Baltimore 1989, 156–64.

¹² A suggestive phrase to describe this phenomenon is the 'archives of repression': Dominique Julia, *La Religion: histoire religieuse*, Paris 1974, ii, 137–67 at p. 147.

¹³ Csaba Pléh, 'A narratívumok mint a pszichológiai koherenciateremtés eszközei' ['Narratives as tools of psychological construction of coherence'], in *Hagyomány és újítás a pszichológiában: Tanulmányok*, Budapest 1998, 365–84 at pp. 369–71.

their convent'.¹⁴) However, in the stories that were related at the request of the bishop-judge to support with concrete details their opinion and to justify the origin of their information concerning the way of life of the friars, a very different social reality comes to the surface. It is clear that the laity had a very intense relationship with the friars. Not only did they attend divine services in their church, but they conversed and spent their leisure time with them in the taverns and had dinners and convivial gatherings together in the convent. This tension of 'fact' and opinion can be explained by the psycho-social adaptation of the self to changes in the social world: the Franciscans were living there at the time and were supported by a powerful archbishop.¹⁵ At the same time, it also suggests that if the witness depositions are read as the product of a process of communication between elite and popular culture, there is a chance to hear – even if only occasionally – the voice of the ordinary man.¹⁶

Questions and hypotheses

The ecclesiastical process and the court-room situation, however, happened elsewhere, and the Augustinian friars in Körmend do indeed seem to have failed to meet the spiritual and moral needs and expectations of the laity.¹⁷ During this period convent life was often reformed by introducing the representatives of another religious order.¹⁸ That the cardinal chose to

¹⁴ *Processus*, fo. 47r.

¹⁵ Theories of psycho-social identity are summarised in Ferenc Pataki, 'Élettörténet és identitás: Új törekvések az én-pszichológiában' ['Life story and identity: new perspectives in ego psychology'], *Pszichológia* xv (1995), 405–34; xvi (1996), 3–47.

¹⁶ For a similar treatment of diocesan visitation records see Angelo Torre, *Il consumo di devozioni: religione e comunità nelle campagne dell'ancien régime*, Venice 1995, pp. xi–xiii. For the narrative approaches of legal documents and witness-hearings see, for example, Miri Rubin, 'The making of the host desecration accusation: persuasive narratives, persistent doubts', in S. Marchand and E. Lunbeck (eds), *Proof and persuasion: essays on authority, objectivity, and evidence*, Brepols 1996, 100–23; Laura Gowing, *Domestic dangers: women, words, and sex in early modern London*, Oxford 1996, 232–62 (narratives of litigation); Karin Telste, 'A tale of courtship or immorality? Some reflections on court records as narratives', in Sølvi Sogner (ed.), *Fact, fiction and forensic evidence, Tid ok Tanke* i (1997), 75–82; and Thomas V. Cohen, 'Three forms of jeopardy: honor, pain and truth-telling in a sixteenth-century Italian courtroom', *Sixteenth Century Journal* xxix (1998), 975–98.

¹⁷ On the reconstruction of the trial see Gabriella Erdélyi, *Egy kolostorper története: hatalom, vallás és mindennapok a középkor és újkor határán* [*The story of a convent's case: power, religion and everyday life at the turn of the Middle Ages and modern times*], Budapest 2005, 21–53.

¹⁸ Several cases are analysed in the abundant German literature of 'Klosterreform'. See, for example, Dieter Stievermann, 'Die württembergische Klosterreformen des 15. Jahrhunderts: ein bedeutendes landeskirchliches Strukturelement des Spätmittelalters und ein Kontinuitätsstrang zum ausgebildeten Landeskirchentum der Frühneuzeit', *Zeitschrift für württembergische Landesgeschichte* xlv (1985), 65–121 at pp. 93–9, and Bernhard Neidiger,

transfer the Augustinian convent to the observant Franciscans was a result of the character and situation of the two orders in late medieval Hungary.

By the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries the observant Franciscans had developed a somewhat ‘popular-spiritual’ profile in Hungary, as opposed to the ‘elitist-intellectual’ mentality typical of the Augustinians. On the one hand, the education of Augustinians focused on theology, and cleric friars were well-educated in their famous convent schools, attracting clerics from outside the order as well, and from universities outside Hungary.¹⁹ On the other hand, Franciscan friars rarely frequented universities and at the beginning of the sixteenth century the leadership of the order offered a template of the Franciscan friar as someone preaching to and hearing the confessions of ordinary people rather than being a qualified theologian.²⁰

The difference to a great extent derived from varying attitudes towards the observant movement. While the Augustinian leadership in Hungary resisted attempts at reform directed from Rome,²¹ the Franciscans underwent a significant revival in the name of observant ideals, communal religious life and evangelical poverty. The ideal of poverty particularly appealed to the laity since by this time their economic interests frequently clashed with those of mendicant houses which held landed property (mills, arable land and vineyards), paradoxically as a result of lay donations and legacies.²² The talented leaders of the order, Pelbárt Temesvári and Oszvald Laskai, compiled several volumes of model sermons composed of simple *exempla* designed for the moral and spiritual instruction of the common

‘Stadtreform und Klosterreform in Basel’, in K. Elm (ed.), *Reformbemühungen und Observanzbestrebungen im spätmittelalterlichen Ordenswesen*, Berlin 1989, 539–69.

¹⁹ Francis X. Martin, *The Augustinian order on the eve of the Reformation*, Louvain 1967; Elemér Mályusz, ‘Az ágostonrend a középkori Magyarországon’ [‘The Augustinians in medieval Hungary’], *Egyháztörténet* i (1943), 427–40.

²⁰ See the letter of the provincial, Blasius Dézsi, in 1514 to the Italian friars concerning the activity of the Italian lector in Hungary: ‘we do not need our friars to be exercised in subtleties and argumentations, but they should rather be trained in the holy scriptures and in more simple studies (“in planis scientiis”), especially the things concerning the hearing of confessions (“in casibus conscientie”), which they need much more’: Jenő Szűcs, ‘Ferenccs ellenzéki áramlat a magyar parasztháború és reformáció hátterében’ [‘The movement of the Franciscan opposition in the context of the Hungarian Peasant War and the Reformation’] *Irodalomtörténeti Közlemények* lxxviii (1974), 409–35 at p. 423. On the ‘pragmatic Franciscanism’ of observant Franciscans in Hungary see more recently the synthesis of Marie-Madeleine de Cevins, *Les Franciscains observants hongrois de l’expansion à la débâcle (vers 1450-vers 1540)*, Rome 2008.

²¹ Gabriella Erdélyi, ‘Crisis or revival? The Hungarian province of the order of Augustinian friars in the late Middle Ages’, *Analecta Augustiniana* lxxvii (2004), 115–40.

²² See the argumentation of Beatrix F. Romhányi, ‘A koldulóbarátok szerepe a xv-xvi. századi vallási megújulásban’ [‘The role of mendicant friars in the religious renewal of the fifteenth-sixteenth centuries’], in Beatrix F. Romhányi and Gábor Kendeffy (eds), *Szentírás, hagyomány, reformáció: teológia- és egyháztörténeti tanulmányok*, Budapest 2009, 151–2.

man.²³ Preaching the crusade against the Turks had also traditionally been the preserve of the observant Franciscans and by the early sixteenth century the tomb of John of Capistrano, who had died in 1456 after a spectacular victory over the infidel at Belgrade, had become the centre of a country-wide cult and pilgrimages.²⁴ It was no coincidence that in 1514 Cardinal Bakócz entrusted Blasius Dézsi, the Franciscan provincial, with the proclamation of the papal crusade bull and with preaching the crusade among the laity. Another traditional activity that brought Franciscans into close contact with the laity was the collection and administration of the jubilee indulgence monies.²⁵

Franciscan popularity among the laity is reflected in the high number of foundations in their favour. During the fifteenth century their supporters built forty-four new convents for them.²⁶ Altogether several thousand Franciscan friars inhabited around 120 convents in the country, by far outnumbering in size and vigour any other religious order in the country (the Augustinians had between thirty-five and forty houses).²⁷ While the Augustinians settled almost exclusively in urban areas, the friars were active in many market towns too.²⁸ Their vigour survived the early Protestant Reformation: not only were many of the new evangelical preachers Franciscans, but the first written refutation and the most fervent opponents of evangelical tenets were from the order.²⁹

²³ On the model sermon collections of Pelbárt Temesvári (Pelbartus de Themeswar) (c. 1435–1504; author of *Stellarium*, Basle 1498, and *Pomerium*, Hagenau 1499) and Osvát Laskai (Oswaldus de Lasco) (c. 1450–1511, provincial in 1497–1501 and 1507; author of *Biga salutis*, Hagenau 1498–9, and *Gemma fidei*, Hagenau 1507) and their widespread European use as shown by their many reprints in the first half of the sixteenth century see Gedeon Borsa, 'Laskai Osvát és Temesvári Pelbárt műveinek megjelentetői' ['The publishers of the works of Osvát Laskai and Pelbárt Temesvári'] *Magyar Könyvszemle* cxxi (2005/1) <http://epa.oszk.hu/00000/00021/00044/Ksz2005-1-01.htm>. See some of the sermons at <http://sermones.elte.hu>. On the preaching activity of the friars in Hungary see Károly Timár, 'Ferencrendi hitzónokok a xv. és xvi században' ['Franciscan preachers in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries'] *Religio* lxxix (1910), 260–2.

²⁴ Cf. Stanko Andrić, *The miracles of St John of Capistran*, Budapest 2000.

²⁵ Jenő Szűcs, 'A ferences obszervancia és az 1514: évi parasztháború: egy kódex tanúsága' ['Franciscan Observants and the Peasant War of 1514'], *Levéltári Közlemények* xliiii (1972), 213–63 at pp. 235–6.

²⁶ Erik Fügedi, 'Koldulórendek és városfejlődés Magyarországon' ['Mendicant orders and urbanisation in Hungary'], in his *Kolduló barátok, polgárok, nemesek: tanulmányok a magyar középkorról* [*Mendicant friars, burghers, noblemen: studies on the Hungarian Middle Ages*], Budapest 1981, 83–4.; János Karácsonyi, *Szent Ferencz rendjének története Magyarországon 1711-ig* [*The history of the order of St Francis in Hungary until 1711*], i–ii, Budapest 1922–4, i. 58–9, 331, 38–9, 356.

²⁷ Erdélyi, 'Crisis or revival?', 115.

²⁸ Fügedi, 'Kolduló barátok', 71.

²⁹ See, for example, the events in Várad (Oradea, Romania), which was the scene of one of the earliest religious disputes in the 1530s: János Horváth, *A reformáció jegyében: a Mohács utáni félszázad magyar irdalomtörténete* [*Engaged with the Reformation: Hungarian literary history in the sixteenth century after the battle of Mohács*], Budapest 1957, 162–3, 181 (for another militant anti-Lutheran observant Franciscan, Demeter Csáti). The convent and town of Sárospatak was another Franciscan centre during the early years of the Protestant Reformation: Jenő Szűcs,

For the secular authority, the scandalous lives of the friars of Kormend – notwithstanding religious arguments during the trial – primarily emerged as a moral-political problem. The lord seems to have been worried mainly about the scandals that disturbed the peaceful everyday life of the town.³⁰ It may well be, however, that ordinary folk were less worried about the upsetting of public order than the cancellation of divine services in consequence of the friars – though often together with them – spending too much of their time in the taverns. As one of the nobleman from the village of Rádóc said ‘there were not as many services as there should have been in such an outstanding friary, due to which the people living here became so indignant, that many complained of how these magnificent buildings were lacking in friars and services’.³¹ The faithful were striving for the means of grace, which ensured both their spiritual and physical well-being. The sacred economy³² was, however, endangered rather than enhanced by the friars, who proved to be unworthy mediators since they celebrated mass in a tipsy state and heard confessions without being ordained.³³

Since, in addition to the friars, there were at least eight priests and numerous other clerics living in Kormend, the indignation and despair of the town-dwellers seems a little surprising. If they wanted to attend mass, they could have gone to the parish church of St Elizabeth, or to the old parish church of St Martin in the north-western part of the town, where an altarist was employed. As the parish priest employed a chaplain as well, and there were clerical students as well as a schoolmaster in the parish school, even public offices could have been sung at the laity’s request.³⁴ Moreover, as well as the high altar, there is evidence of a further four side-altars and their altarists in the parish church. Why, then, were parishioners so attached to these ‘bad’ friars and their scarce services?

Perhaps the friars offered something that the local secular clergy could not. Perhaps the townsmen considered that the convent was not only a source of additional resources of the sacred, but also as a place of a more individual kind of religious experience compared to the communal experiences at the parish

‘Sárospatak reformációjának kezdetei’ [‘The beginnings of the Reformation at Sárospatak’], *A Rádáy Gyűjtemény Évkönyve* ii (1982), 36.

³⁰ This is suggested by the fact that after the Augustinians had been removed, and the scandals had ceased, the lord was no longer interested in restoring the convent buildings notwithstanding the Franciscans’ repeated requests for financial help.

³¹ *Processus*, fo. 55rv.

³² For the elaboration of the concept see Robert W. Scribner, ‘Cosmic order and daily life: sacred and secular in pre-industrial German society’, in his *Popular culture and popular movements in Reformation Germany*, London 1987, 2–16.

³³ *Processus*, fo. 54r: Friar Blasius drinking wine right before starting mass. For comments on Friar Anthonius hearing confessions although not yet ordained see n. 119 below.

³⁴ For an urban example of this lay demand see Elemér Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom a középkori Magyarországon* [*Ecclesiastical society in medieval Hungary*], Budapest 1971, 140.

church. The divergent strands of late medieval religious culture produced a kind of ‘consumption’ of the sacred whereby the laity – in the course of an intensive communication with the clergy – appropriated the sacred, and reinterpreted and used religious practices as social and cultural rites constructing and representing the community.³⁵ As far as spiritual needs and experiences are concerned, the term is simply used to denote the laity’s increasing appetite for and investment in the tools of spiritual salvation. A magnate woman, voicing her motivations when founding a perpetual chantry in a Corpus Christi chapel, stated that ‘Anything we dedicate from our goods to the salvation of souls, will be to our benefit in the afterworld.’³⁶ A considerable increase in pious legacies – especially in testimonies of townsmen – has been observed in Hungary from the second half of the fifteenth century onwards. In terms of their distribution, two points are significant. On the one hand, there was a marked preference for Franciscan convents, followed by those of other mendicant orders, over monastic houses;³⁷ on the other hand, townspeople attempted to provide pious legacies for all the religious institutions – for all the parish churches if there was more than one, for convents and hospitals and chapels alike – of their towns and its neighbourhood,³⁸ representing the practice of consuming all possible sacred media of salvation.

This article is divided into four main sections. First, the religious ‘supply’ in the market town of Körmend will be described, focusing on the role of the parishioners in providing for the town clergy and the churches. It will be shown that there was an intense lay demand for the clergy and the rituals performed by them, and that parishioners were ready to invest financially in maintaining them, even if it involved considerable additional expenses above their obligatory church dues. In the second part will be presented the different strategies of the townsmen, all aimed at restoring the religious life and services within the convent. Their behaviour will be assessed as a symptom of the eucharistic and penitential devotional culture of the time, which was regulated in practice by the principle of intercession and the institution of good works. Finally, the potential appeal of the mendicant convent will be mapped in the spiritual market of the town.

In terms of Hungarian historiography, the early and splendid monograph of Lajos Pásztor on late medieval piety rehabilitated the state of Catholicism in the parishes of pre-Reformation Hungary.³⁹ More recently, scholarly

³⁵ For this use of the term see Torre, *Il consumo di devozioni*.

³⁶ Remig Békefi, *A káptalani iskolák története Magyarországon 1540-ig*, [*The history of chapter schools in Hungary until 1540*], Budapest 1910, 440–1.

³⁷ Romhányi, ‘A kolduló barátok szerepe’, 145–6.

³⁸ Judit Majorosy, ‘Church in town: urban religious life in late medieval Pressburg in the Mirror of Last Wills’, unpubl. PhD diss. Budapest 2006.

³⁹ Lajos Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete a Jagellók korában* [*The religious life of Hungarians in the age of the Jagiellos*], Budapest 1940, repr. 2000.

literature on late medieval piety has focused on different rituals and institutions of religious practice, such as long-distance pilgrimages, pious donations or lay confraternities.⁴⁰

It has been comprehensively and convincingly argued in an English context that late medieval piety was distinctive for its powerful image of the suffering Christ.⁴¹ The image of Christ on the Cross replaced the earlier central and popular image of Mary with the Child. In terms of religious behaviour and rituals, the Christocentric turn of late medieval piety is tangible in the growing emphasis and power of the ritual manifestations and manifold uses of the body of Christ, among them the reception of the eucharist. The eucharistic focus of late medieval piety is richly documented and discussed in the literature.⁴² Another strand of research is dedicated to the sacrament of penance and the ritual of confession, primarily based on confessional manuals.⁴³ Here the eucharistic and penitential character of late medieval religious culture, traditionally represented separately, will be portrayed as an integrated whole.

The town and its spiritual market

The parish priest of Körmend seems not to have been chosen by the congregation; rather, the lord presented his own candidate to the bishop of Győr (*Iauriensis*).⁴⁴ However, it seems that the lord's choice did not go

⁴⁰ Enikő Csukovits, *Középkori magyar zarándokok (Hungarian pilgrims in medieval Europe)*, Budapest 2003; Majorossy, 'Church in town'. For confraternities see (with further literature) Judit Majorossy, 'A Krisztus Teste Konfraternitás a középkori pozsonyi polgárok életében' ['The Corpus Christi confraternity in the life of the citizens of Bratislava'], in E. Csukovits and T. Lengyel (eds), *Bártfától Pozsonyig. Városok a 13–17. században [From Bártfa to Bratislava: cities in the 13th–17th centuries]*, Budapest 2005, 253–91, and Marie-Madeleine de Cevins, 'Les Confréries en Hongrie à la fin du moyen âge: l'exemple de la confrérie "Mere de Miséricorde" de Bardejov (1449–1525)', *Le Moyen Âge* cvi (2000), 347–68.

⁴¹ Christine Peters, *Patterns of piety: women, gender and religion in late medieval and Reformation England*, Cambridge 2003, *passim*.

⁴² The most comprehensive work on late medieval eucharistic piety is Miri Rubin, *Corpus Christi: the eucharist in late medieval culture*, Cambridge 1991. For some aspects in Hungary see Maria Crăciun, 'Rural altarpieces and religious experiences in Transylvania's Saxon communities', in R. Muchembled and W. Monter (eds), *Cultural exchange in early modern Europe*, iv, Cambridge 2006, 191–217.

⁴³ The classic work is Thomas N. Tentler, *Sin and confession on the eve of the Reformation*, Princeton 1977.

⁴⁴ The nomination of the parish priest was not included in the town's letter of privilege of 1244: Bándi, *Körmend a középkorban*, 14. The *ius patronatus* could occasionally be separated from the right to nominate the parish priest in instances when the patron conveyed this right to the community: András Kubinyi, 'Plébánosválasztások és egyházközségi önkormányzat a középkori Magyarországon' ('The nomination of parish priests and self-government of

against the wishes of the town: the townsmen had a good relationship with him, and they even complained many times to the parish priest about the friars or asked his help in disciplining them.⁴⁵

The parish priest Stephanus had arrived in the town at the time when Petrus Erdődy became lord: at the hearing he called him his patron. Even so, maintaining the parish priest involved no insignificant financial burden for the parishioners. In simple (i.e. not privileged) parishes like Körmend, the incumbent received only a small part, if any, of the tithes.⁴⁶ Consequently, his maintenance fell increasingly on members of the community, who owed him parochial tax and payment in kind or cash for liturgical services and special ceremonies (weddings, funerals, baptisms).⁴⁷ Over and above this, however, the majority gave voluntarily and generously, in the form of pious donations and legacies, to have masses said for family members and their own salvation, or for the maintenance of the church and parish buildings ('pro fabrica').⁴⁸ The latter was motivated not by ecclesiastical, but primarily by communal customs and expectations. In market towns and villages alike, these funds were administered – separately from the parish priest's revenues – by churchwardens elected by the parishioners.⁴⁹ The parish priest's welfare, therefore, alongside the revenue from his farming, was dependent to a large extent on fees received for the performance of liturgical services. In turn, this depended to a large extent on lay demand for sacraments and votive masses. The employment of a chaplain (or chaplains) also depended to a significant extent on the laity's liturgical needs, sometimes even their stipulations. Chaplains shared the fees for these services with their parish priest, in a system which was regulated by contract. In Körmend, chaplains seem regularly to have been employed. Elias, priest from Morác, who was parish priest of Csákány village in 1518, had previously been employed as chaplain

parish communities in medieval Hungary'), in his *Főpapok, egyházi intézmények és vallásosság a középkori Magyarországon* [*Prelates, ecclesiastical institutions and religious life in medieval Hungary*], Budapest 1999, 270.

⁴⁵ See n. 66 below.

⁴⁶ On the contest between the middle and the lower clergy over the tithes in the diocese of Győr (*Iauriensis*) and elsewhere see Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom*, 49–53.

⁴⁷ On the incomes of parish priests see Ferenc Kollányi, *A párbér jogi természetéhez* [*On the legal character of 'párbér'*], Budapest 1908; Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom*, 138; István Szabó, *A középkori magyar falu* [*The medieval village in Hungary*], Budapest 1969, 200–4; and László Solymosi, 'Egyházi és világi (földesúri) mortuarium a 11–14. századi Magyarországon' [*Ecclesiastical and secular (manorial) mortuarium in Hungary in the eleventh–fourteenth centuries*], *Századok* cxxi (1987), 547–83 at pp. 547–62.

⁴⁸ Among the legacies of testators in Sopron the ones 'zum paw' were the most frequent: Katalin Szende, 'A soproni középkori végrendeletek egyház- és tárgytörténeti tanulságai' [*The church- and material historical lessons of the medieval wills of Sopron*], *Soproni Szemle* xlv (1990), 268–72 at p. 269. On votive masses see n. 58 below.

⁴⁹ András Kubinyi, 'Egyház és város a késő középkori Magyarországon' [*Church and city in late medieval Hungary*], in his *Főpapok*, 287–300, 295.

in Körmend.⁵⁰ When, prior to this, he had been a student in the Körmend school, as he related in his deposition, ‘for want of friars, from time to time he had sung mass with his fellow students on high days in the convent’. Another one-time student, Nicholas, parish priest from Szecsőd, his native village, had similar memories about his student years. The career of Blasius, priest from Gyarmat, differed only slightly from that of his schoolmates: after his studies he served in Körmend as schoolmaster before taking on his shoulders the pastoral care of the villagers of Szentkirály.⁵¹

The school in Körmend, like other parish schools in market towns and villages, fulfilled several functions. The basic education of the children of Körmend and surroundings was carried out within its walls (reading, writing, arithmetic and religious instruction). The senior students, who were preparing for clerical careers, together with the head of the school, were assistants to the parish priest: whilst they shared with the chaplain a portion of the sum received for the ceremonies, their task was to enhance the grandeur of the divine services. Besides this, they rang the bells, and on feast days they organised mystery plays.⁵² For instance, Ascension Day was made memorable in Körmend by their presentation of the ascension of Christ.⁵³ Such students, after a modest education, generally ended up as village priests in the region.

The altarists were also at the disposal of the parishioners. Five altarists ministered in Körmend, their income provided by donations from the laity. They operated in relative independence from the parish priest, under the patronage of their founder, who may nevertheless have delegated the nomination of the incumbent to either the parish priest or the congregation. The foundation of altars and chapels presupposed the availability of considerable disposable (i.e. acquired as opposed to inherited) income.⁵⁴ Since,

⁵⁰ Joannes de Halogy, an altarist in Körmend in 1562, had also been a chaplain previously: Haus- Hof- und Staatsarchiv, Familienarchiv Erdödy, Kt 96, fasc. 8, no. 15. According to Mályusz, the living standards of chaplains rose in the later medieval period due to the increase in lay liturgical demands: *Egyházi társadalom*, 142.

⁵¹ Elias, priest from Morác: *Processus*, fos 64v–65r; Nicholaus, priest from Szecsőd: ‘Dicit etiam testis habuisse conversationem cum dictis fratribus, quoniam etiam ibidem cum aliis scolaribus propter defectum fratrum fuisset vocatus et cantasset missam’: fo. 79v. Blasius, priest from Gyarmat: fos. 74v–77r.

⁵² Remig Békefi, *A népoktatás története Magyarországon 1540-ig* [*Popular education in Hungary until 1540*], Budapest 1906, 21–51.

⁵³ ‘in oppido Kermend et in platea magna oppidi eiusdem in domo circumspecti Iohannis Zabo tunc iudicis dicti oppidi, ubi testis convenisset ad videndum representari per scolares et rectorem sole ascensionem Domini’: *Processus*, fo. 74rv; cf. Jenő Házi, *Sopron középkori egyháztörténete* [*The ecclesiastical history of Sopron in the Middle Ages*], Sopron 1939, 240–3.

⁵⁴ For example a village with a mill and two meadows as an altarist benefice (in Illava, by the magnate Balázs Magyar, in 1489): Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom*, 147–9. For examples of chapel foundations see Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 77, 90, 91.

therefore, even the urban elite of free royal cities could seldom afford to endow them,⁵⁵ the beneficed altars in Körmend, with perhaps one exception, were founded by the magnate lords of the town. The altar to the Virgin Mary in the parish church of St Elizabeth was founded in 1485 by one Borbála Szécsi, widow of Lord Bertold Ellerbach, in exchange for one tenth of the income from a Körmend and a Szecsőd mill. A mass was to be said every day by the altarist. However, the parish priest may have kept this income for himself, since later Borbála's son had to request the parish priest to employ an altarist, and he supplemented the benefice with one tenth of the income from the other Körmend mill. The beneficiaries of the St Catherine altar in the parish church (Albertus, priest from Nagylyszka) and of the altar to the dead in St Martin's church (Laurentius, priest from Körmend), both witnesses at the interrogation, named Petrus Erdődy as their patron. So these altars too were founded by the lord. No details survive, however, about the circumstances in which the Holy Cross and St Nicholas altars in the parish church were founded.⁵⁶

Urban communities and guilds of the free royal cities occasionally raised a chapel and maintained it.⁵⁷ However, the foundation of new benefices seems to have exceeded the financial means of the parishioners in a market town, although town-dwellers could augment their means of salvation by endowing existing beneficiaries with perpetual or temporal chantries.⁵⁸ In spite of this, it appears that the people of Körmend were not at all satisfied with their situation. As the witnesses' remarks reflect, they insisted on the presence of the Augustinian friars as well as their services in addition to that of the eight local priests and numerous clerical students.

⁵⁵ Of the medieval wills of the burghers of Sopron 80% have donations *propter anime salutem*. Only a small part of them (18 persons) could afford to found an altar, some of them for their own sons. The number of perpetual chantries (weekly masses) was higher 16%: Szende, 'A soproni középkori végrendeletek'.

⁵⁶ On the altars to the Virgin Mary and to the dead see Bándi, *Körmend a középkorban*, 71–2, 91 n. 120. On the incumbents of the Holy Cross altar see István György Tóth, *Jobbágyok, hajdúk, deákok: a körmendi uradalom társadalma a 17. században [Peasants, soldiers and students: the social history of the Körmend manor in the 17th century]*, Budapest 1992, 140. On the altarist of the St Nicholas altar see *Processus*, fo. 27v.

⁵⁷ The community of Pozsony (Bratislava, Slovakia) raised a chapel to the honour of St Sebastian at the time of the 1502 plague, and established a guild in the Franciscan church to maintain it: Tivadar Ortway, *Geschichte der Stadt Pressburg*, ii/4, Pozsony 1903, 526, 528. The city of Sopron also built a chapel in the second half of the fourteenth century, which was then maintained by the citizens' guild: Házi, *Sopron*.

⁵⁸ For the wills of town-dwellers and their pious donations see MOL, DL 46538, and *Egyháztörténelmi Emlékek a Magyarországi Hitújítás korából [Sources on church history at the time of the Reformation in Hungary]*, ed. V. Bunyitay, R. Rapaics and others, i–v, Budapest 1902–12, i, no. 66.

The townsmen in action

The anger and anxiety felt by the laity as regards the Augustinians primarily derived from their neglect of their liturgical duties rather than their womanising and tavern-going. As Petrus Kovács ('smith'), a peasant from Rátold deposited, 'as the friars were few, they set aside every service and evensong apart from the one mass, which greatly scandalised the locals'.⁵⁹ As the petty noble Franciscus Nádasdy, who lived in the neighbourhood, expressed it: 'he heard on innumerable occasions from the people living in Körmend how they complained about the friars; they cursed them, mocked them and mistreated them because of their neglect of the vespers and the services'.

The people acted in many different ways to ensure liturgical services in the convent church. The scene of regular meetings between the Augustinians and the faithful was on the one hand the friars' church, where the people came to mass, vespers and for confession, and on the other the convent and the taverns, where they socialised informally. In all these places laymen often rebuked the friars for their negligence. When, however, they asked the friars why they neglected the celebration of divine services and the maintenance of the convent buildings, the Augustinians shifted the responsibility onto the townspeople's shoulders: they could do no more with the small alms that they received from the laity.⁶⁰ They clearly charged a high price for their services, therefore, regarding their sacred authority, which ensued from their priestly function, as a commodity.

The irresponsible and irreverent attitude of the friars is also reflected in the testimony of Paulus Nagy ('Great'), the dean (*decanus*) of the lay confraternity in the convent church:

When friar Ambrosius rang the bells for vespers, he had set out for the convent with the intention of attending vespers, however, he did not find any friars there. He met with friar Ambrosius only, who was already heading to the tavern. When he asked him, whether vespers had been already said, the friar replied: 'We cannot do both, ringing the bells and singing the vespers at the same time!'⁶¹

Beyond rebukes, the anger and anxiety of the people manifested itself in certain situations in the form of mockery. 'The friars go to the tavern so early in the morning that they say mass there rather than in the convent'. Albertus Szabó ('tailor') from Rádóc remembered this sarcastic saying about the Augustinians going around the town.⁶²

⁵⁹ *Processus*, fo. 93v.

⁶⁰ For such 'material' excuses of the Augustinians see the testimonies of the parish priest of Körmend (*ibid.* fo. 88r), and the townsmen Gregorius Polgár and Andreas Csuti (fos 90v, 92r).

⁶¹ *Ibid.* fo. 86r.

⁶² *Ibid.* fo. 57r.

People, however, did not react in the same way in similar situations. Some left the church in indignation after waiting in vain for morning mass to be celebrated.⁶³ The nobleman Franciscus Nádasdy turned to the townspeople in his despair. When he told them that he had found neither friar nor mass in the convent, they answered to him with resignation: ‘how could there be any mass, when no one lives in the convent? And sometimes they have to wait a week for a mass or the holy hours to be celebrated’.⁶⁴ Others, instead of leaving the church in disgust when the mass was cancelled, would themselves serve at the altar at masses said by a friar living alone in the convent. Petrus Kovács said that ‘sometimes only two, or even just one friar was present, so much so, that when that one wished to celebrate mass, one of the peasants had to minister to him at the altar’.⁶⁵

In the interests of disciplining the friars, the townsmen even mobilised the ecclesiastical and secular authorities, thus raising their squabbles to an official, public level. On the one hand, many complaints about the Augustinians were heard by the priests of Körmend and its surroundings, as a result of which the parish priest Stephanus often censured the ‘black friars’ for letting the convent fall into ruin, and for their outrageous lifestyle.⁶⁶ Since the secular priests had no jurisdiction over the convent and could only put informal pressure on the friars, the townsmen were left dissatisfied and attempted to involve the secular and ecclesiastical superiors of the convent. Thus, on occasions, they urged the castellans, the local representatives of the patron, to intervene. The one-time castellan Paulus Nagy, from Kemesmál, reminisced that ‘the people frequently complained to him as local functionary about the transgressions and excesses of the friars’, and on occasions ‘some of the people of the manor approached him with the request, to let them break into the convent and drag the suspicious women out of the friars’ lodgings’.⁶⁷

Finally, the town magistrate appealed several times by letter to the provincial of the Augustinians: ‘in the interests of God and the spiritual benefit of them all, he should take care that the convent should not suffer such a lack of services, and should send as many friars as can hold masses and vespers properly, as well as other services, and could further the edification of the faithful by their zealous deeds’.⁶⁸ Their request was not without effect: the provincial himself came to Körmend to visit the convent,

⁶³ The nobleman Andreas Sáli from the village of Sál: *ibid.* fo. 42v.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.* fo. 69v.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.* fo. 39v.

⁶⁶ ‘frequentissime redarguisse et corripuisse fratres predicti monasterii de tanta negligentia divinatorum officiorum et de tanta desolatione monasterii et scandalosa eorum vita Et de scandalo testi constat, quatenus aliquando populus oppidi Kermend sibi conquesti fuissent de divinatorum officiorum negligentia et de desolatione’: *ibid.* fo. 88r. For the complaints to the parish priests of the villages of Kólked and Szentkirály see fos 74r, 75v.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.* fos 73r, 72v.

⁶⁸ See the deposition of two townsmen, Simon Rosos and Matthias Tapasztó, *ibid.* fos 83v, 100v.

and to avenge and eliminate the infractions. As reported by witnesses, however, all willingness to help on the part of the order's leadership proved to no avail: the brothers openly denied their obedience, and the small number of new friars placed there were unable to make radical changes to the situation. As related by Simon Rosos, 'at their request, the provincial did not send more than two-three or four friars to Kőrmend convent, so that the Augustinians were thus four in total, or even three or two, and occasionally five, then sometimes six to eight ..., who soon became depleted to such an extent, that only one friar was left'.⁶⁹

If they had managed to restore the convent community to its full complement of twelve friars (which was the case when finally the Franciscans took over), the total clerical body in the town would have amounted to around twenty priests (and numerous clerical students) for 650 town-dwellers. This results in a ratio of one priest to every thirty-two persons, which would have equalled the clerical provision in the free royal cities of Hungary or even the situation in some western European cities.⁷⁰ Generally speaking, the townsmen had a huge demand for the clergy and their liturgical services as well as a readiness to invest financially in maintaining them. They employed different strategies to improve the life of the convent and the friars – words and deeds, mockery and occasional violent self-defence; they even started to restore the ruinous convent church themselves. As the crisis deepened some saw the breaking off or at least the loosening of ties with the friars to be the best solution to the situation. According to the churchwarden, 'the zeal of the faithful for the Augustinian friars abated to such an extent, that several of them were even unwilling to attend their masses'.⁷¹ Others considered the withdrawal of financial remuneration to be the appropriate response to the decrease in religious services. The Kőrmend resident Matthias Tapasztó often heard the people talking among themselves: because of their neglect of the services, they no longer felt that they owed the friars any alms.⁷² The problem could thus have been solved, in terms of the material or pragmatic attitude openly expressed by the friars: no mass, no alms.

The people did not think like this, however. On the one hand, they merely used the cut-back in support as another means of reforming the friars,

⁶⁹ Paulus Nagy mentioned the 'rebellion' of the friars: 'Dicit preterea testis se scire, quod fratres ipsi aliquando insurrexissent contra eorum provincialem, dum ipsos visitasset et pro huiusmodi eorum excessibus corrigere voluisset ita, quod se in eiusmodi eorum delictis emendari facere non permisissent': *ibid.* fos 72v, 84r (Simon Rosos).

⁷⁰ Sopron had 3,000 inhabitants with ten ecclesiastical institutions (including a Franciscan convent). Calculating 100 clergymen (in the parish church alone there were 20 side-altars) the ratio of clergy to laity was 1:30: Szende, 'A soproni középkori végrendeletek', 270.

⁷¹ *Processus*, fo. 87r.

⁷² 'Scit etiam testis fuisse dictitatum sepius inter cives dicti oppidi, quod propter negligentiam eorundem fratrum Augustinensium in divinis, non deberent dare eis elemosinas': *ibid.* fo. 100v.

although they did not consider it as in any way a final solution. On the other hand, in exchange for their alms, they did not only expect that the friars would provide them with a surplus of divine grace mediated in the sacraments, in addition to what they could receive by attending the parish church. Although the parish priest of the village Kőlked recalled that after he had waited in vain in the convent for the mass, he decided that he would in future go to the parish church when he stayed in Körmend,⁷³ the situation was far more complex. The convent liturgy would have provided not only more possibilities of encountering the sacred sphere, but also religious experiences that differed in nature from those available in the parish church. Why, however, did the experience of the sacred matter to them so much?

The economy of the sacred

To the late medieval mind, the manifestations of the sacred within the material world established the principle of order. Liturgical rites as well as the rites of passage in the life-cycle of the individual regulated both the sacred and the social order.⁷⁴ Late medieval people could experience the sacred most regularly within the liturgy of the mass when the emphasis was on transubstantiation, the true presence of Christ in the host, which represented the most elementary manifestation of the sacred.⁷⁵ As the transformation could only be performed by an ordained priest, the popular magical world and the church's control were both evident here.

Historians argue that in the later Middle Ages parishioners generally received the eucharist once a year, at Easter, after they had confessed.⁷⁶ Official expectations in Hungary were conceived in accordance with the universal code: 'during Lent, the people should be admonished to prepare for confession and the eucharist, so that everyone can confess and receive communion on the day of resurrection': thus the bishop of Veszprém directed his priests in 1515.⁷⁷ The scanty data available suggest that the

⁷³ Ibid. fos 69v, 73v.

⁷⁴ The concept is constructed and discussed in detail by Robert Scribner, 'Cosmic order and daily life: sacred and secular in pre-industrial German society', in his *Popular culture*, 2–16.

⁷⁵ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 12–35, 83–107.

⁷⁶ The Fourth Lateran Council (1215) made Easter confession to the parish priest and communion obligatory: *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, ed. J. Alberigo, J. A. Dosetti Perikle and others, Bologna 1973, 245. On the practice of confession see Tentler, *Sin and confession*, 70–82, and Virginia Reinburg, 'Liturgy and the laity in late medieval and Reformation France', *Sixteenth Century Journal* xxiii (1992), 539–41.

⁷⁷ *A vespérméi egyház 1515: évi zsinati határozatai* [The synodal decretals of the diocese of Veszprém in 1515], ed. L. Solymosi, Budapest 1997, 98, lines 1397–9. The central role of communion is well reflected by the fact that the Synod of Veszprém added the most detailed and lengthiest amendments to earlier decrees when describing the sacraments of confession and communion,

Church was describing normal practice. During the days following the latest designated time for Easter confession (Holy Thursday), almost all (thirty-three out of thirty-six) the lay witnesses interrogated in the course of the trial in Körmend, declared that they had ‘made confession and received the eucharist around Easter time’. The constantly repeated comment made by late medieval diocesan councils (‘as the faithful usually receive the eucharist once a year’) also suggests that the custom was to take communion once a year.⁷⁸

It seems that confessions were heard during Holy Week and according to local custom the confessor was entitled to a penny from men, and a loaf of bread from women.⁷⁹ People acted rationally: they went to confess as close to the time of receiving the eucharist as possible. The parish priests, though, had to exhort people to cleanse their conscience from their sins as early as possible during the period of Lent.⁸⁰ The diocesan council of Lőcse (Levoča, Slovakia) even provided the parish priests with the practical advice that they should ring the bells at an appropriate hour every day during the first half of Lent, thus inviting the people to confession. Early confession was urged first of all so that the priests could detect sins reserved for episcopal or papal absolution, a list of which was announced from the pulpit each Sunday in Lent. In spite of this, many deferred confessing until the end of Lent. This is suggested by the fact that only those were punished who did not go to confession even then.⁸¹

Confession and communion, however, were not only the central sacramental rituals of the feasts commemorating the passion and resurrection of Christ. They were also inextricably linked to the individual’s death. The practice can be approached via surviving records of extraordinary cases. It was the custom for the dying to bequeath something to the parish priest in exchange for hearing his or her confession. Certain greedy parish priests tried to make a law out of the custom, and would not bury the dead until the heirs had paid out the usual amount. In a witness testimony commenting on the abuses of the parish priest of Nagyszentpál, it is stated that ‘due to the sensual

and its liturgy in both kinds. (These amendments will be signalled below in brackets). On earlier diocesan synods see Alexander Szentirmai, ‘Die ungarische Diözesansynode im Spätmittelalter’, *Zeitschrift der Savigny-Stiftung für Rechtsgeschichte, Kanonische Abteilung* xlvii (1961), 266–92.

⁷⁸ *A veszprémi egyház*, 60, lines 397–8.

⁷⁹ The general practice is revealed by the abuse of the greedy parish priest of Szentpéter and Nagyszentpál, who demanded more: MOL, DL 14548 (1452). See moreover Házi, *Sopron*, 334.

⁸⁰ See the *exempla* concerning confession in the model sermons of Pelbárt Temesvári, *Pom. Quad.*, 1, 12, N. As sermons were designed for and used by the lower clergy in their preaching to the simple folk, it is possible to consider them as a source for the knowledge and behaviour of the lower clergy.

⁸¹ *Sacra Concilia Ecclesiae Romano Catholicae in regno Hungariae celebrata ab anno Christi MXVI usque ad annum MDCCXXXIV*, i–ii, ed. C. Péterffy, Pozsony 1741–2, i. 192–211 at p. 193.

idleness of the parish priest, one of the peasants departed from this world without either confession or the last rites', and because of such cases the peasants were moving to other estates. The great significance attributed to last confession is also suggested by the fact that a legal report on a feud mentioned that a sick person who had been dragged out of bed, 'departed without confessing his soul', whilst being threatened.⁸²

However, the thesis which contrasts the regular confession and communion widespread in the modern age with the annual practice in later medieval times must be slightly modified. Pilgrims setting out in crowds on the feasts of Christ, Mary and the saints, as well as on the anniversaries of the consecration of shrines, could only hope for indulgence for sins that they had confessed. Partaking in the holy eucharist was also a precondition for indulgences.⁸³ Along with this, it is difficult to say how much the clerical admonition to repent and confess as often as possible above the obligatory minimum struck a receptive chord among parishioners. The institution of private confessors, apparently widespread among the aristocracy and the urban elite, certainly allows for the assumption that many confessed frequently.⁸⁴ Even the Church itself, however, did not recommend regular participation in the eucharist, but just more than once, or perhaps two to four times a year, on major feast days.⁸⁵ The ecclesiastical concern is well reflected in a decree of the Council of Veszprém in 1515, admonishing the lower clergy to prevent people from taking the eucharist frequently through enhancing reverence for the host:

If we contemplate the greatness of the most holy body and the divine majesty, we could find nothing to evoke in us deeper reverence than this sacrament. In adoration and participation in this, we can fulfil the devotion necessary for our salvation; nevertheless, we may not omit anything of which we are capable by human effort. So let the priests be attentive and circumspect during administration of this sacrament and unification with the divine, that the irrational populace approach this sacrament, worthy of unconditional adoration, not only with piety, but also with

⁸² MOL, DL 14548; DL 14694 (1453); DL 105546 (1526). See moreover the expression of fear of sudden death without taking the eucharist in manuscript prayer books: András Ferenc Molnár, 'Két régi ima az oltáriszentségről' ['Two old prayers on the eucharist'], *Nyelvtudományi Értekezések* cxlviii (2000), 16–17.

⁸³ See the privileges of indulgence granted for churches under construction: MOL, DL 15499 (1460), 14671 (1453). For further examples see Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 144–5.

⁸⁴ Temesvári, 'Sermo de confessione frequenter facienda pro gratia amplianda', *Pom. Quad.*, 1, 35. Antoninus Florentinus (1389–1459), archbishop of Florence, in his very popular manual on confession (*Confessionale*), published also in Buda in 1477, recommended monthly confession: *Régi Magyarországi Nyomtatványok, 1473–1600* [Old Hungarian printed books, 1473–1600], i, Budapest 1971, no. 3. For papal dispensations for private confessors see *XV. századi pápák oklevelei* [Breves of fifteenth-century popes], ed. P. Lukcsics, i–ii, Budapest 1931–8, passim.

⁸⁵ Peter Browe, *Häufige Kommunion im Mittelalter*, Münster 1938, 28–9. Ecclesiastical literature stressed the importance of clerical communion on behalf of the laity: Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 50.

fear. First and foremost, though, the priests must not present the living and heavenly bread to the Christian faithful in small broken pieces, but the eucharist should be provided to the laity as a round form, since this way devoted women can more easily be withdrawn from taking communion too often.⁸⁶

The final lines testify to the contemporary perception of women as being outstandingly devout.⁸⁷ As has been plausibly argued, the differentiation of religious practices of men and women was not, as traditionally assumed, a recognition of an innate female religiosity. Gendered differences in ritual practice rather reflected the division of roles within the household, women having a considerable field of action in public religious rituals (for example rites surrounding birth and death).⁸⁸ On the other hand, clerical concerns rested on the traditional representation of women as lustful temptresses. Writers of pastoral advice suggested to priests that women who came to confess often must be heard only briefly and publicly.⁸⁹

Behind the clerically suggested attitude towards the eucharist of reverence mixed with fear lies the manifold prescriptions that made it very difficult for parishioners to meet the requirements for worthy communion (strict fasting and abstinence, perfect penitence and sacramental confession). As a result, an ambivalence of desire and fear, of transmitting aid and – if taken unworthily – harm, surrounded the body of Christ. The process of popular appropriation of church teachings generated a special cult. In the later Middle Ages, alongside the annual sacramental communion, the regular practice of spiritual communion became particularly widespread. While the Church attributed the effect of transmitting divine grace to the practice, parishioners expected first and foremost healing and protection from looking upon the elevated host following the moment of transubstantiation.⁹⁰ It seems reasonable to suppose that this kind of magical use of the eucharist influenced the layfolk to attend the ritual of the mass more frequently than the Sundays and feast days expected by the Church.⁹¹ As becomes clear from the testimonies of the witnesses, attending mass formed part of the daily routines of both townsmen and the noblemen and peasants from the

⁸⁶ *A veszprémi egyház*, 98, lines 1388–96 lines (amendment).

⁸⁷ Caroline Walker Bynum, 'Women mystics and eucharistic devotion in the thirteenth century', in her *Fragmentation and redemption: essays on gender and the human body in medieval religion*, New York 1992, 119–50.

⁸⁸ Peters, *Patterns of piety*, 15–19.

⁸⁹ Florentinus, *Confessionale*, 24.

⁹⁰ Molnár, 'Két régi ima', 26–8 (prayers for elevation). For the liturgy of elevation see *A veszprémi egyház*, 99–100, lines 1432–9 (amendment). See also Charles Caspers, 'The western Church during the late Middle Ages: *Augenkommunion* or popular mysticism?', in C. Caspers, G. Lukken and G. Rouwhorst (eds), *Bread of heaven: customs and practices surrounding holy communion: essays in the history of liturgy and culture*, Kampen 1995, 83–97; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 62–73; and Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 72.

⁹¹ Eamon Duffy, *The stripping of the altars: traditional religion in England, 1400–1580*, New Haven 1992, 95–102.

villages: whoever came into town to attend to his affairs, would also drop into the convent church for mass. The zeal of nobleman Paulus Nagy is perhaps no exception: 'he would go to the convent every day, when they were celebrating mass, and he visited the church regularly both before his being castellan and during his time, but also after he had been removed from office'.⁹² Of course, as church ordinances forbidding premature departure would suggest, many just waited for the elevation of the host.⁹³

Alongside the body and the passion of Christ, late medieval devotional culture focused upon the concept of purgatory. From being a transitional state between death and eternal bliss, by the fifteenth century it had been transformed into a 'third place' between this world and the next.⁹⁴ With the stress on the sinfulness of mankind in the face of Christ, the gulf between the human and the divine increased.⁹⁵ Therefore, only those very few of saintly life would have no need to pay for their venial sins in purgatory and could get straight into the presence of the Lord. For the majority, purgatory was a place of transitional suffering. All who died in a state of venial sin, or who forgot to confess something, or who had not obeyed the commandment of love, had to stand the pains of the 'cleansing fire'; however, if mortal sin had been forgiven in confession and one had received the eucharist on his or her deathbed, one could also be confident of eventual salvation.⁹⁶ Underlying this triple scheme – hell, heaven and purgatory – was, of course, the passion of Christ, which made possible the reconciliation of mankind with God, in other words, the redemption from original sin.

Humans could partake in the infinite treasure of merits gained by Christ on the cross by their good works.⁹⁷ The most effective proponents of the religious culture organised around penance and good works, the pains of purgatory, the passion of Christ and the eucharist were the mendicant orders. Friars appeared in the early thirteenth century, at the same time as the duty of annual confession was decreed for all Christians, and new teachings on purgatory and good works were formulated. As confessors and preachers primarily in urban settings, as well as instructors of the parish clergy as authors of pastoral manuals, they played a significant role in spreading new teachings. As they were dependent on almsgiving, they needed not only to be

⁹² *Processus*, fo. 72r. For others testifying to the everyday attendance at mass see fos 45r, 60v.

⁹³ Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 71–2; *A veszprémi egyház*, 72, lines 716–20 (amendment).

⁹⁴ Jacques Le Goff, *The birth of purgatory*, Aldershot 1984, esp. pp. 133–76.

⁹⁵ Peters, *Patterns of piety*, passim.

⁹⁶ Duffy, *Stripping of the altars*, 338–54 (the pains of purgatory). Temesvári, *Pomerium de sanctis, pars hyemalis*, 8, discussing the last judgement, says that those of saintly life reach heaven at once, and only those end up in hell like Herod, Pontius Pilate and Judas and the like, meanwhile the rest of the souls suffer in purgatory.

⁹⁷ Antal Schütz, *Dogmatics: Dogmatika: A keresztény hitigazságok rendszere* [*The system of Christian truths of belief*], i–ii, Budapest 1937, ii. 572–7 (indulgence), 698–705 (purgatory); Robert N. Swanson, *Religion and devotion in Europe, c. 1215–c. 1515*, Cambridge 1995, 37.

competent through their higher educational standards, but also interested in emphasising the value of good works.⁹⁸

The three basic forms of satisfaction for temporal sins as well as of meritorious works (as also preached by observant Franciscans in Hungary), were, in order of benefit, almsgiving, prayer or attending mass, and fasting or, more generally, abstinence.⁹⁹ As the opportunity to give satisfaction for temporal sins ended with death, to advance the progress of the soul in purgatory was incumbent on family, relatives and friends, who could pray and have masses said for the souls of the departed; in return the justified could intercede for the worldly happiness of the living. Thus, although the Church in principle emphasised the significance of personal life, pious deeds and repentance in the economy of salvation as opposed to intercession,¹⁰⁰ the notion of purgatory and good works advanced the working of the institution of intercession in everyday practice.

The meritorious effect of good works functioned both ways: the poor who received alms, the dead helped by masses, or the clergymen heaped with donations had to pay back their debts by further prayers for their benefactors.¹⁰¹ The principle of reciprocity and intercession also prevailed in a broader sphere: Christians who founded a chapel or a chantry had a share in the meritorious effects not only of the masses said by the altar priest, but also of the prayers of the congregation. By a new foundation the means of grace for the whole congregation increased significantly: they had gained a stipendiary priest, to whom they themselves could also give further commissions, and by attending his masses they could promote their earthly and heavenly welfare alike.¹⁰² A married couple, citizens of Nagybánya (Baia Mare, Romania), 'attempting to avoid the final hazard to their souls, the end of their lives by means of good works', in their testament dated 1475 made the following provision: the chaplain that they had employed should say a mass every Thursday in honour of the Body of Christ, and in such

⁹⁸ Roberto Rusconi, *L'ordine dei peccati: la confessione tra medioevo ed età moderna*, Bologna 2002, 105–60; Giovanni Miccoli, 'Gli ordini mendicanti e la vita religiosa dei laici', *Storia d'Italia*, ii, Turin 1974, 793–875; Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 87–9, 109–12; Zelina Zafarana, 'La predicazione ai laici dal secolo XIII al XV', *Studi Medievali* xxiv (1983), 265–75; David L. d'Avray, *The preaching of the friars: sermons diffused from Paris before 1300*, Oxford 1985. For the preaching of the observant Franciscans in Hungary see n. 22 above.

⁹⁹ Temesvári, 'Sermo de partibus satisfactionis et de pervalore earum ac dispensatione', *Pom. Quad.*, I, 48, P. See moreover Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 18–19.

¹⁰⁰ Temesvári, *Pomerium de sanctis, pars hyemalis*, 3, L: 'all Christians will be finally judged according to good works of piety'; *Pom. Quad.*, I, 5, U: 'God has more mercy on a true penitent than through the intercession of all saints. If someone in the state of mortal sin refuses to confess his sins, God will not forgive him, even if asked by the Virgin Mary and all saints'.

¹⁰¹ 'Sermo de partibus satisfactionis et de pervalore earum ac dispensatione', Temesvári, *Pom. Quad.*, I, 48, U: 'alms have the merit of prayer and fasting ..., deserves more grace, since the one, who receives it, is obliged to pray for the benefactor'.

¹⁰² Clive Burgess, *The parish, the Church and the laity in late medieval Bristol*, Bristol 1992, 4–6.

a way that ‘the miraculous sacrament ... be graciously presented to the gaze of the parishioners’ and ‘the miraculous body of Christ’ be carried round in a procession to be held once a month preceding the mass’.¹⁰³ The chantry’s beneficiaries were the altarist of the parish church of St Elizabeth of Kassa (Košice, Slovakia) and the city magistrates. The peculiar situation that a couple from Nagybánya made provisions in another city can be explained by the popularity of Corpus Christi confraternities, active in Kassa at the time. Most of the confraternities organised by townsmen in late medieval Hungary dedicated themselves to the cult of the body of Christ:¹⁰⁴ besides their regular Thursday masses and processions, they played an important role in augmenting the glamour – and the intercessory powers – of the Easter liturgies and Corpus Christi for the whole parish.¹⁰⁵

The friars’ spiritual advantage

Besides the merits gained by almsgiving to the Augustinians, the daily ceremonies in the convent which supplemented the official high masses of the parish church would have constituted an enormous advantage. The presence of the friars provided a better opportunity for festive masses with singing and more celebrants assisting, which was considered by the laity to be more efficacious. Moreover, with the friary, the clerical capacity needed for votive masses paid for by parishioners increased significantly. This was important, since officially a priest could say only one mass a day.¹⁰⁶ Votive masses assumed extraordinary significance in the piety of townsmen, since they were designated for goals chosen by them and celebrated in special forms, which made the layfolk attribute special efficacy to them.¹⁰⁷ Votive masses at the side-altars or those celebrated every weekday morning in the convent, in comparison with the Sunday services held in the parish church, constituted a special experience in yet another regard: whilst the latter were community observances, the former, with their simple ceremony and few participants,

¹⁰³ Békefi, *A népoktatás*, sources, no. 141.

¹⁰⁴ For a list of Corpus Christi confraternities see Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 23–7; András Kubinyi, ‘Vallásos társulatok a késő középkori magyarországi városokban’ [Religious confraternities in late medieval Hungarian cities], in *Főpapok*, 346, 350.

¹⁰⁵ Majorossy, ‘Corpus Christi’, 268–72.

¹⁰⁶ Rubin, *Corpus Christi*, 50; Pásztor, *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 81. Although the practice went against regulations, priests often celebrated twice or thrice a day, which also reflects the scale of lay demand.

¹⁰⁷ The belief in the increased efficacy of votive and festive masses is an argument of Lajos Pásztor based, on the one hand, on German cases, when this unorthodox lay belief generated complaints from the clergy, and, on the other hand, on the rich missal literature of Hungary describing votive masses: *A magyarság vallásos élete*, 73–5.

could perhaps more easily become occasions for an encounter between the individual and God.¹⁰⁸

Parishioners particularly depended on mendicant friars for an increase in the secular grandeur and other-worldly effectiveness of the liturgy in memory of the dead and other *post-mortem* ceremonies. Paradoxically, it was for this particular reason that the friary in Körmend stood empty from time to time: according to Andreas from Csut, for instance, they would be left without a mass in the town, when ‘the friars were invited to other churches to pay final respects to the departed by celebrating the funeral ceremonies’. Laurentius, priest from Körmend, also related that the ‘friars or a friar would be invited to the villages together with secular priests to bury the dead, or to hold a memorial’, and the altarist must have gone with them at such times.¹⁰⁹ The cemetery by the convent indicates that many chose to be buried there. Nicholaus Borsos, a peasant from the village of Sál, explained to the judges that he went to the convent because he brought a small donation to the Körmend friars to have a mass said, perhaps to shorten the sufferings of some departed relative on the anniversary of his death.¹¹⁰ It is comprehensible, therefore, that it was a cause for indignation when the Augustinians slept through the time for morning mass and got up at noon, as witnessed by the fellow students of Benedictus Sibrik, or that at times they did not celebrate mass for days on end. When Franciscus Nádasdy found neither friar nor mass in the convent, he was told by town-dwellers that he might even have waited for a week in vain.¹¹¹

A further duty of the friars was to pray for parishioners at their public holy hours, which again provided a different kind of religious experience for those laymen who attended. The parish priest said his office privately. The Augustinians friars – as witnesses argued – neglected these offices too. Their laxity, beside the recurring complaints of the people, is demonstrated by the case of Friar Blasius, who drank away his breviary in the village tavern of Ják. This rare pledge, worth several florins, had to be redeemed from the innkeeper by the prior, as a petty noble from Rádóc recalled.¹¹² The parishioners were worried about negligence over the offices, since they wanted to participate in them, especially in the early morning and evening prayers. The castellan of Körmend said for example that ‘he often visited the convent to hear mass, but he never participated in the morning office, but

¹⁰⁸ For a similar interpretation see Duffy, *Stripping of the altars*, 109–16, 125–7.

¹⁰⁹ *Processus*, fos 91v–92r (Andreas from Csut), fo. 95r (Laurentius from Körmend). See Péter Berta, ‘A túlélők teendői: a posztmortális szolgálatok rendje későközépkori városaink vallásos közösségeiben’ [‘The obligations of survivors: the order of *post mortem* service in late medieval Hungarian urban congregations’], *Századok* cxxxii (1998), 765–92 at p. 782.

¹¹⁰ *Processus*, fo. 82v.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.* fos 43v–44r (Benedictus Sibrik), fo. 69v (Franciscus Nádasdy). Simon Rosos, citizen of Körmend (fo. 83v), also ‘knew for sure that in different periods though, the friars did not celebrate mass for many days in the convent church’.

¹¹² *Ibid.* fo. 54v.

sometimes in their vespers'.¹¹³ The testimonies of witnesses taken together reflect that the parishioners often visited the convent. They spoke spontaneously about the detail of the buildings: they mentioned the belfry, the ambulatory, the organ-loft, kitchen, the inner court, the upper house next to the friars' rooms.

Their knowledge of convent space goes beyond ritual activities to reflect the informal use of space. 'He had met the friars very often in their convent for different reasons ..., sometimes to hear mass or canonical hours, other times to converse and eat together with the friars', as an old and well-to-do citizen, Simon Rosos remembered.¹¹⁴ His convivial relationship with the friars derived from his status as *confrater*: he was a member of the confraternity of the Augustinians. Paulus Nagy also told the enquiry that 'since he was their *confrater*, he often visited them in their convent ... in order to hear mass and to manage their affairs'.¹¹⁵ The admission of a layperson into a mendicant confraternity was usually the high point of a long-standing relationship, manifested in pious donations or patronage of a house or order. Lay-brethren shared in the merits of the friars' liturgical acts, and had the right to be buried in the convent church. The choice of a burial place in a convent rather than the parish church seems to have become a popular practice and extended not just to the aristocracy but to town-dwellers, as reflected by the rivalry for burial rights between secular clergy and mendicants.¹¹⁶

The presence of the Augustinians provided the parishioners with the opportunity to choose whether to go to their parish priest for confession,¹¹⁷ or to one of the friars. Several of the witnesses took advantage of the latter. Lucas from Mindszent, living in Hollós and former castellan of Körmend, related that 'he would keep company with the Augustinian friars from time to time, sometimes dropping in to talk to them, at other times to make a confession'. Nicholas Pondor, from the nearby village of Nádálja, also recalled that 'sometimes he attended mass in the convent, in other words, when there

¹¹³ Ibid. fo. 60v.

¹¹⁴ Ibid. fo. 84r.

¹¹⁵ Ibid. fo. 86r. The Augustinians' confraternity is not otherwise documented.

¹¹⁶ For aristocrats see Kornél Szovák, 'Meritorium apud Dominum fructus cumulatorum. Megjegyzések a 14. század főúri vallásosságához' ['Notes on fourteenth-century aristocratic piety'], in P. Tusor (ed.), *R. Várkonyi Ágnes Emlékkönyve*, Budapest 1998, 79–97 at p. 82. For citizens see the case of a citizen of Buda who was member of eight religious confraternities: F. Romhányi Beatrix, "'Mereretur vestre devocionis affectus...': Egy vallásos középkori budai polgár: Söptei Péter, kancelláriai jegyző' ['A pious citizen from medieval Buda: Péter Söptei, notary of the chancellery']', in B. Romhányi, A. Grynaeus and others (eds), *Es tu scholaris: studies in honor of András Kubinyi*, Budapest 2004, 37–44. For more examples see Karácsonyi, *Szt Ferencz*, i. 345, 351, 355, 357, 381, etc. For conflicts over burial right see Romhányi, 'A kolduló barátok szerepe', 146–7, 150–1.

¹¹⁷ The Fourth Lateran Council prescribed confession to the parish priest, but added that 'if someone has a good reason to confess his sins to someone else, he should first ask and receive permission from his own priest': *Conciliorum oecumenicorum decreta*, 245.

was mass, and sometimes he went to make his confession there too'.¹¹⁸ They were probably both talking about occasions above the obligatory, annual confession. Their confession seems not to have been reckoned any more extraordinary than going to mass, or popping into the convent in the afternoon for a little chat. The complaint was heard several times at the hearing that Friar Anthonius would hear confessions even though he was not yet ordained.¹¹⁹ This reinforces the assumption that the parish clergy could not satisfy the penitential needs of the laity. It was most probably, although not only, a question of frequency, but people may have tended to choose friars as confessors and spiritual advisers for the sake of a personal and spiritual relationship, the type of experience which could not be provided by parish priests, who rather acted on behalf of the entire community.¹²⁰ As for the character of the confessional rite itself, their voluntary confessions on weekdays under quiet and peaceful conditions within the convent cannot be compared with the prescribed confession as a condition of participation in the collective Sunday communion in the scramble of Holy Week, performed in the sight of all. The mendicant convent in the town therefore carried the potential for individual and voluntary spaces and practices of lay devotion beside the official, communal and prescribed forms of parish piety.

The maintenance of preaching positions or the provision of occasional preachers, in order to supplement the Sunday and feast-day sermons of the parish priest, was a considerable financial burden on congregations. The Augustinian convent and friars in Körmend provided the potential for this service at a very low price.¹²¹ The parishioners of Körmend, in quite an exceptional manner, chose an altar, or maybe even founded one for their confraternity in the Augustinian's church, rather than in the parish church. On the one hand, their choice may reflect the community's desire for an independent sphere of religious action from that of the parish priest. Autonomy and responsibility went hand in hand: the members of the confraternity collected money and restored the convent church themselves, instead of giving it to the negligent friars.¹²² As is clear from the testimonies of witnesses, the confraternity was an urban religious institution, since its known members were all recruited from town-dwellers rather than from the nobility of the

¹¹⁸ *Processus*, fo. 60v (L. from Mindszent), fo. 63r (N. Pondor).

¹¹⁹ *Ibid.* fos 67r, 87r, 105r.

¹²⁰ In the late fifteenth century widows with no heirs often gave very generous pious bequests to single friars, who supported them spiritually and financially in their old age: Romhányi, 'A kolduló barátok szerepe', 149–50.

¹²¹ For urban preaching positions see Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom*, 317–19. There is a reference to the preaching of the Augustinians in Körmend at *Processus*, fo. 62r.

¹²² The restoration work was mentioned by several witnesses, for example *Processus*, fos 45v, 84v, 86v.

surrounding villages.¹²³ The lay confraternity seated in the convent church is another sign of the townsmen's attempts to create the possibilities of religious experiences framed by the convent rather than their parish church.

While Mary and the saints were the celestial intercessors for men in the scheme of salvation, the ordained priesthood served as intercessors on earth. In the formulation of contemporary synodal books 'Priests are intercessors between God and Man, preaching to the people the commandments and turning to God with the supplications of the people.'¹²⁴ In the later Middle Ages, the intercessory role of the clergy intensified in the course of the eucharistic turn of devotional culture, since they were defined as the only legitimate administrators of the eucharist.¹²⁵ Therefore, the anger directed against the Augustinians in Körmend was primarily aimed at intercessors who neglected their duties: thus the friars disturbed the economy of the sacred, jeopardising the spiritual and physical security of the community. What is more, they did this at a time when parishioners wanted to take part in the duties of the clergy in ever more varied forms (masses, canonical offices, confraternities), thus accumulating their own merits. The friars' negligence of liturgical services disappointed the people all the more as the mendicant convent in their town could have provided for them with great advantages, additional religious experiences. The competition between a mendicant community and a parish church for their favours and investments could have created the opportunity of choice. More important, while the parish church was a place of communal religious experiences, mendicant friars seem to have served the demand of the laity for individual spiritual practices.

The increased role of the ordained clergy in the economy of the sacred ran counter to the growing autonomy of individuals and communities in the religious sphere. The profound pastoral and jurisdictional changes within the Church in the twelfth and thirteenth centuries came fully to fruition at the parish level – with the mediation of mendicant friars – in the generations immediately before the Protestant Reformation. The religious argument presented by the agents of convent reform in Körmend was understood and responded to by lay witnesses, since religion figured not only as a clerical, but as a lay – communal as well as individual – responsibility. People readily invested – financial offers counted as acts of good work – in maintaining

¹²³ The members of the confraternity were Paulus Nagy, the dean of the confraternity, Georgius Király, who was also town judge, and Simon Rosos, all citizens of Körmend: *ibid.* fos 84v, 86v, 99r. The lay confraternity in Körmend is otherwise not documented: Kubinyi, 'Vallásos társulatok', 346.

¹²⁴ *A veszprémi egyház*, 63, lines 477–80.

¹²⁵ This process is described by Charles Zika as a strategy of certain clerical elites in order to maintain control over access to the sacred: 'Hosts, processions and pilgrimages: controlling the sacred in fifteenth-century Germany', *Past and Present* cxviii (1988), 25–64.

a stipendiary clergy and took advantage of their religious rituals. This process of the consumption of the sacred was primarily aimed at individual salvation.

The fact that the number of Augustinians living in the convent was not sufficient to perform the liturgical services that they required made the townsmen anxious. The parish priest of Körmend, in accord with other witnesses, recalled that

He has often scolded the friars for neglecting their convent and for their scandalous way of life, but they answered that they were not sufficient in themselves to amend these things because they were getting so little alms as would not sustain enough of them to live there to be able to administer all offices and canonical hours.¹²⁶

The friars set a higher price on their services, considering their sacred power, stemming from their priestly function, as a commodity. And indeed, some of the people thought to respond to the ebb of religious services by withholding their financial support. Matthias Tapaszto often heard the townsmen saying that they should not pay any alms to the friars because of their liturgical negligence. In terms of the materialistic or pragmatic mentality formulated by the friars the situation could have been thus solved: no money, no religious services. The townsmen, however, did not think like that. They withheld their financial investments in order to force the friars to improve their behaviour rather than as a final solution.

Given the lack of secular jurisdiction over the convent the townspeople were somewhat restricted when compared with the control that they could exercise over the secular clergy: from the fifteenth century onwards parish priests had been increasingly obliged upon their installation to settle their conflicts with the laity before the manor court.¹²⁷ Control over mendicant convents was all the more difficult, since the friars remained socially outsiders in local communities. The parish clergy were closely integrated into the urban community. Out of the thirteen priests at the interrogation, only two came from places outside the diocese, while the majority served in the vicinity of their native villages and four of them 'at home'. One was Laurentius de Körmend, an altarist in the church of St Martin who, as he said in his testimony, was born, like his parents, in Körmend, and spent most of his days in the town.¹²⁸ Moreover, the lower clergy, being uneducated (or at least unevenly educated) and having local kinship networks, a household and often a family and a farm, constituted a kind of bridge between the profane and the sacred social spheres and hence were more easily integrated

¹²⁶ *Processus*, fo. 88r.

¹²⁷ György Bónis, 'Az egyházi bíraskodás fejlődése a Mohács előtti Magyarországon' ['The development of ecclesiastical jurisdiction in medieval Hungary'], in *Szentszéki regeszták: iratok az egyházi bíraskodás történetéhez a középkori Magyarországon* [*Register of records of ecclesiastical courts: documents on the history of ecclesiastical jurisdiction in medieval Hungary*], ed. G. Bónis, Budapest 1997, 655.

¹²⁸ *Processus*, fo. 95rv.

into local communities.¹²⁹ The friars, on the contrary, represented a totally different lifestyle: they were educated in convent schools, lived in clerical communities, often moved between convents and came from faraway places and did not live on land but on monetary gifts. Lacking the means of legal and social discipline, the community was thus in a difficult situation if the friars did not come up to their expectations. The non-payment of alms was a two-edged sword, since it was detrimental – a kind of denial of good works – to their own salvation.

This aspect of late medieval piety, the selling of religious services and the popular consumption of the sacred appalled Luther, the observant Augustinian monk. Instead of good works, he emphasised justification by faith. While continuities existed in other spheres – like Christocentric religious understanding¹³⁰ – this entailed a total break with late medieval religion in terms of rituals: an end to the consumption of the sacred as understood in late medieval Körmend.

¹²⁹ For a general description of the late medieval rural parish clergy see Mályusz, *Egyházi társadalom*, 37–170, 209–304. For comparisons see A. Pettegree (ed.), *The Reformation of the parishes: the ministry and the Reformation in town and country*, Manchester 1993.

¹³⁰ Peters, *Patterns of piety*, 4.